



## *City of Beaumont*

### PRESS RELEASE

The City of Beaumont received a courtesy copy of a lawsuit filed by the Department of Justice in Federal Court on Tuesday alleging housing discrimination of people with disabilities in the enforcement of overly restrictive zoning laws, fire safety, and building codes. In the mid-eighties, advocacy groups for persons with disabilities sought the integration of persons with disabilities into all residential neighborhoods in the communities in which they lived. In 1985, the Texas State Legislature passed the Community Homes for Disabled Persons Location Act. The Act was designed to facilitate the dispersal of residents with disabilities throughout the communities of the state. The City of Beaumont adopted this state law into its zoning ordinances in 1987. The law provides that "a community home may not be established within one-half mile of an existing community home" in order to accomplish adequate dispersal. The Community Homes Location Act allows these facilities, generally operated by for profit corporations, to provide services for up to six (6) disabled persons in addition to two (2) staff providers at each location.

In addition, the Department of Justice is alleging the City's fire codes are overly stringent, as they require additional safety measures for those not capable of saving themselves in the case of a fire.

The City of Beaumont continues to be concerned about these facilities and their occupants from a life safety standpoint since a 2002 fire took the lives of two (2) elderly disabled residents of a local group home in west Beaumont. The unlicensed and unregulated home occupied by three (3) elderly disabled residents and a single operator was found to be in violation of several fire, building and mechanical codes. Only the 51 year old operator and an 89 year old disabled resident managed to escape the blazing house.

The City of San Antonio experienced a similar horror when five (5) elderly disabled residents died when a fire ripped through an illegally unlicensed group home in 1998.

The safety and well being of all residents of the City of Beaumont are the primary concerns in the enforcement of the ordinances here in the City.

Tyrone E. Cooper  
City Attorney  
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